
A Lesson Plan for

NEH Institute: “Social Movements in Modern America: Labor, Civil Rights, and Feminism”

James A. Diskant, Ph.D.

Focus/Summary:

The purpose of this lesson is to have students understand the role of print advertising directed at women before the women’s movement began to change attitudes towards women and the effect of the movement on advertising afterwards. In the 20 years after World War II, societal expectations emphasized a domestic role for women; as a result of the women’s movement of the 1960’s and 1970’s these attitudes began to change. While messages towards women of all social classes began to shift towards a greater message of equality, the shift was greatest for middle-class women.

In this lesson students will analyze two representative forms of advertising – one from the 1950’s and one from the 1970’s – so as to understand messages from each of these advertisements. Then they will pretend to be a middle-class woman or a middle-class man supporting or opposing the changes that have developed and write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper about their position. Finally, they will share their letter to the class so as to assess the potential and challenged of the emerging definition of gender. It could be used in a United States history survey course, an AP United States Government course, or an elective on Global Issues/Problems or in a Sociology course.

Vital Theme and Narrative:

Patterns of Social and Political Interaction

Habits of Mind:

- Understand the significance of the past to their own lives, both private and public, and to their own society; and

- Perceive past events and issues as they were experienced by people at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness

Objectives:
• Students will understand the role of advertising in the social construction in gender expectations

• Students will analyze the role of the women’s movement in changing the nature of advertising and in developing a new sense of gender construction

Procedures:

This is intended as a two day lesson; prior to Day One, assign relevant textbook reading on the background of the women’s movement.

Day One:

Opening the Lesson:

Initial Brainstorming Questions (15 minutes)

1.) What is the role of advertising in the world today?

2.) What kinds of advertisements do you think are directed at women today? Why?

Developing the Lesson:

Part One: Image Analysis (20+ minutes)

The first image comes from 1957 and is about margarine; the second images comes from the late 1970’s and is about clothing:

Image #1:

http://www.adclassix.com/ads/57bluebonnet.htm

Image #2:

http://pzrservices.typepad.com/a/6a00d83451ccbc69e20128759175e6970c-pi

When your students look at each image, have them ask the following questions:

1.) What do you see in the ad?

2.) What is way in which the product is being sold? Why?

3.) Who is the intended audience? How can you tell?

4.) In what ways would the ad appear to have been effective? Not effective?

5.) In what ways does the first ad reinforce the gender expectations of the period? In what ways does the second ad challenge those expectations?
Part Two: Reflection Questions (10 minutes)

1.) In what ways is advertising a product of societal expectations?
2.) In what ways do societal expectations influence advertising?

Part Three: Assign Homework for Day Two:

Explain that they are to imagine that they are middle-class women and men; divide the class in half and have half (whether they are men or women) write a letter to the editor of their local newspaper, supporting or rejecting the ideas that come out of the second ad in terms of gender roles. Not only should they write the letter (about one typed page in length), but they should also be ready to read it to the class tomorrow.

Day Two:

Assessing Student Learning:

Part One: (30+ minutes)

Have students read their letters aloud; ask others to take notes on common reasons in support of or opposed to the societal changes. In reconvening the class, have the students make a chart where they analyze the advantages (including increased opportunities, increased income, greater sense of equality for both women and men), as well as potential challenges (mainly middle-class benefits, new conformity, discomfort for some men).

Part Two:

Reflection Questions: (10 minutes)

1.) What are advantages of the changing gender roles?
2.) What are possible problems of these changes?